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Guides to English Classics Series

MERCHANT OF VENICE

(Shakespeare)

BY

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THE NATURE OF THE PLAY

The Merchant of Venice is at once the most powerful of all Shakespeare's comedies, and one of the most perfectly constructed of all his plays. It partakes of the serious interest of a great tragedy, and at the same time gives the pleasing, restful satisfaction of a happy comedy.

Nowhere is the element of tragedy more keenly felt than in the character of Shylock. Loss and disaster attend him on every hand. Antonio, too, is sad and in peril of death. All is lost unless Bassanio succeeds in the great lottery that decides not only the marriage of Portia but the destinies of all the other characters in the play.

The structure of a tragedy requires an opportunity for voluntary choice. The decision made inevitably leads to disaster for the chooser. The structure of a comedy requires a happy ending for the character most concerned. *The Merchant of Venice* is a unique blending of the two. Freedom of choice appears many times. Antonio may refuse to lend the money to Bassanio. He may refuse to sign the dangerous bond. Every decision made leads apparently to misfortune. The outcome is dark and foreboding, and the play assumes a tragic disposition. Suddenly, like the *Deus ex machina* of the Greeks, Portia appears, and a solution is found for every difficulty. The play is seen in its rightful aspect and all ends happily.

The rising action concerns itself with the wooing of Portia. It begins with the *impelling moment* of Antonio's

sealing the bond that makes the courtship possible. From that moment on, the action develops many critical moments. Every choice of the caskets is a crisis. Bassanio's choice is most important of all. While this part of the action advances, a second, complicating action arises. Antonio is a bankrupt. His ships have all miscarried. He cannot pay his debts. A long period of suspense follows. The climax is reached when Portia exclaims:

"This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood."

The falling or descending action is typical of the comedy. The various threads of the narratives are rapidly disentangled, and the conclusion is reached in "love, moonlight, and touches of sweet harmony."

SOURCES OF THE PLAY

The major part of the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* was taken from the novel *Il Pecorone,* written by Giovanni Fiorentino in 1378 and published in 1558, and from the *Gesta Romanorum,* the *Cursor Mundi,* and other earlier collections of stories. The main thread of the plot was probably well known in Shakespeare's time, for Stephen Gosson in 1579 makes reference to an earlier play—"The Jew, shewn at the Bull, representing the greedyness of worldly choosers and the bloody minds of usurers." As all trace of this play has been lost we can but point out the curious coincidence. The pound of flesh episode was especially well known, for in Percy's *Reliques* we have an old ballad "A New Song" which has as its descriptive subtitle, "Shewing the cruelties of Gernutus, A Jewe, who, lending to a merchant an Hun-

dred Crowns, would have a Pound of His Fleshe, Because He could not Pay Him at the Time Appointed."

The casket story is also found in the *Gesta Romanorum.* It is probably the most ancient of the three, for a Greek version entitled *Barlaam and Josaphat* can be traced as far as the year A.D. 800—the period of Charlemagne.

The *Gesta Romanorum* is the most important source. It was available in English translation as early as 1510, and six different versions issued between 1577 and 1602 were at Shakespeare's disposal.

Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (1589), while in strange contrast to the spirit of Shakespeare's play, probably suggested the Lorenzo-Jessica plot.

A number of unimportant similarities to other works might be indicated. The real worth of the play, however, is the creation of Shakespeare's master mind.

Date.—*The Merchant of Venice* was listed by Meres in 1598, and was probably finished in 1597, as it is the last of Shakespeare's plays in this list. The earliest published forms were the two quartos of 1600 which differ from each other in a number of minor details. The quartos were apparently never republished. The folio of 1623 gives a slightly altered version and is the text now generally accepted.

THE THEATRE

Before Shakespeare.—When the early actors sought for a place in which to perform their plays, it was but natural that they should turn to the inn yards. Here

they were not only certain to find suitable accommodations, but even more important, an audience. The limitations of the structure available for stage, dressing rooms, etc., forced the actors to be content with a meagre amount of property and of costume.

The Shakespearean Theatre.—When the drama became important enough to have a home of its own, theatres were built. At first they were modeled on the plan of the inn yards. The early play-houses had no roofs and even as late as the time of the Globe and the Fortune, only part of the enclosure was covered. Performances were abandoned whenever the weather was inclement. As artificial light was impracticable, performances were given in the early afternoon.

Appeal to Imagination.—The average playgoer in Shakespeare's day had abundant imagination. A few painted cloths, everyday articles of furniture, and occasionally some artificial trees and grass were all the stage properties available. More were not needed. Story and incident were more important than setting. A happy phrase, or the recitation of a choice selection of poetry, especially if it had a strong imaginative appeal, were appreciated and admired for their own merit.

Imagination and superstition frequently go hand in hand. This was especially true in the time of Elizabeth. Ghosts were real and terrible. The character that was confronted by the ghost was doomed, and the Shakesperian audience realized it. Witches and their cauldrons, soothsayers and their prophecies, and disturbances of nature, and were freighted with significance and firmly believed.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

Dramatis Personæ.

The Duke of Venice.
The Prince of Morocco, } suitors to Portia.
The Prince of Arragon, }
Antonio, a merchant of Venice.
Bassanio, his friend, suitor likewise to Portia.
Salanio, }
Salarino, }
Gratiano, } friends to Antonio and Bassanio.
Salerio, }
Lorenzo, in love with Jessica.
Shylock, a rich Jew.
Tubal, a Jew, his friend.
Launcelot Gobbo, the clown, servant to Shylock.
Leonardo, servant to Bassanio.
Old Gobbo, father to Launcelot.
Balthasar, } servants to Portia.
Stephano, }
Portia, a rich heiress.
Nerissa, her waiting-maid.
Jessica, daughter to Shylock.
Magnificoes of Venice, Officers of the Court of Justice, Gaoler, Servants to Portia, and other Attendants.
Scene: Partly at Venice, and partly at Belmont, the seat of Portia on the Continent.

Act I

Antonio, a prosperous and highly esteemed Merchant of Venice, is afflicted with an unwonted sadness that forecasts the spirit of the first four acts. The efforts of his friends to interest him prove of no avail and he is left alone in the company of Bassanio. Bassanio deeply loves Portia and feels that the love is mutual. In order to help Bassanio woo the heiress of Belmont, Antonio agrees to lend him three thousand ducats. As all Antonio's capital is invested in divers ships at sea he decides to borrow the money from Shylock, a Jewish money-lender.

In the second scene we are introduced to Portia and her maid Nerissa. From the conversation we are permitted to overhear, we gather that of all the many suitors, Bassanio is secretly favored. The entry of the Prince of Morocco promises to throw considerable light on the secret of the caskets.

In the meantime Antonio and Bassanio meet Shylock and solicit the loan of three thousand ducats. Shylock's warm denunciation of Antonio, and the latter's cool defiance give little promise of an amicable arrangement. Antonio signs a bond agreeing to forfeit a pound of flesh in default of payment on the date the bond fell due. This he did with little thought for "his ventures were not in one bottom trusted" and he expected "return of thrice three times the value of the bond" a month before the day.

Act 2

On our return to Portia's house we learn in detail the conditions attending the choosing of the caskets. Our curiosity is aroused and we regret that we may not know more of their secrets until the Prince of Morocco makes his choice after dinner.

Meanwhile, we are entertained with a typically Elizabethan low-comedy scene—the Launcelot-Gobbo episode. At the same time Bassanio prepares to go to Belmont, and Jessica in another quarter is ready to desert her father, steal his treasures, and elope with Lorenzo.

The interest in the masque scenes that follow is scenic and purely incidental. The plot action is not advanced.

In Scene Seven we return to Belmont. Before the Prince of Morocco are the three caskets. The golden one entices with the inscription "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire." The silver casket promises "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves." The dull lead casket bluntly states "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." The dusky prince decides to open the golden casket. A carrion death crushes all his hope and he departs unsatisfied.

In the eighth scene we learn indirectly of Shylock's ravings on discovering his loss and the absence of his daughter. Our fears for Antonio increase when tidings of shipwrecks reach our ears. The only ray of comfort is found when the Prince of Arragon shows us that the silver casket is not the favored one, and we eagerly await the arrival of Bassanio.

Act 3

Our worst fears are now confirmed. Antonio has lost his ships and their now doubly valued cargo. The news reaches Shylock while the poor man is frantic with the loss of his treasure and the elopement of his daughter. Tubal in his blundering way makes the situation worse by his ill-chosen incidents of Jessica's prodigality.

Bassanio finally reaches Belmont and to our relief wisely chooses the leaden casket. Portia is his. Hardly has Portia entrusted her possessions to his keeping than a letter arrives from the ill-fated friend. Portia claims the wifely right to share the contents of the paper that "steals the color from Bassanio's cheek." Antonio is bankrupt and in jail. His bond is forfeited. He must die. Portia furnishes Bassanio bountifully with money and he hastens to Venice to aid his devoted friend now in such dire straits. At the same time Antonio is being led away to jail at the insistence of irascible Shylock.

Portia resolves to take an active part in the saving of Antonio. With Nerissa's aid, she plans to appear at Antonio's trial disguised as a young Roman lawyer. Accordingly she leaves her home in the care of Lorenzo and Jessica and goes to Venice.

Act 4

The Duke of Venice is greatly distracted at the prospect of a fatal outcome to the trial before him. He is on the point of adjourning the court, when Nerissa appears in the guise of a clerk and announces the coming

of a representative from Bellario—the great lawyer of Padua. So clever is Portia's disguise that even Bassanio does not recognize her. In consequence of her eloquent pleading and shrewd legal acumen Shylock not only loses his strange suit but suffers the confiscation of his property for plotting against the life of Antonio. Even his life is at the mercy of the Duke.

Shylock's life is spared and half his possessions are restored to him in trust for Jessica on condition that he becomes a Christian. This he assents to and the papers are prepared for his signature.

Bassanio, delighted at the unexpected outcome, urges the young lawyer to accept a generous fee. Portia, bold in the security of her legal garb, much prefers to tease her husband and asks for his gloves and ring. Mindful of the vow made to Portia when the ring was given to him, he is reluctant to part with this treasured possession and the doctor departs in angry scorn. Later on he yields to Antonio's plea and sends the ring to Portia. In a similar way Nerissa secures her husband's ring in spite of his ardent vows to keep it until death.

Act 5

Antonio accompanies his friend Bassanio home to Belmont, where Portia and Nerissa await their coming. Shortly after their arrival Nerissa taunts Gratiano with the loss of his ring. His defense that he followed Bassanio's example arouses Portia's pretended ire. In vain does the unhappy husband plead extenuating circumstances. At length to relieve Antonio's feelings Portia

reveals her part in the trial and offers Bassanio the ring as evidence.

Antonio's ships have safely come to harbor and the play ends happily for all.

CHARACTERS

Shylock

The character of Shylock cannot be rightly or completely understood unless the student attempts to estimate the great degree to which Shakespeare transcends the prejudices of his age. Shylock has nothing in common with Barabas in *The Jew of Malta.* Although Shakespeare subjected him to many of the indignities practiced in a cruel and bigoted age, he had vision enough to realize that any character dependent solely on racial hatred would soon become extinct. He therefore carefully motivated every act of Shylock's, with the result that he wins the sympathy of every spectator when he is scorned by Antonio. Shylock's hatred is not blind. Often has Antonio outraged his racial patriotism, thwarted him in business ventures, and heaped insult and abuse upon him in public.

William Hazlitt sums up his character by saying: "There is a strong, quick, and deep sense of justice mixed up with the gall and bitterness of his resentment. The constant apprehension of being burnt alive, plundered, banished, reviled, and trampled on, might be supposed to sour the most forbearing nature, and to take something from that 'milk of human kindness,' with which his

persecutors contemplated his indignities. The desire of revenge is almost inseparable from the sense of wrong; and he can hardly help sympathizing with the proud spirit, hid beneath his 'Jewish gaberdine,' stung to madness by repeated undeserved provocations, and laboring to throw off the load of obloquy and oppression heaped upon him and all his tribe by one desperate act of 'lawful' revenge, till the ferociousness of the means by which he is to execute his purpose, and the pertinacity with which he adheres to it, turn up against him; but even at last, when disappointed of the sanguinary revenge with which he had glutted his hopes, and exposed to beggary and contempt by the letter of the law on which he had insisted with so little remorse, we pity him, and think him hardly dealt with by his judges."

Bassanio

Bassanio is represented as a soldier and a scholar, and the best deserving a fair lady. Antonio loved him as the dearest friend for whom he would gladly sacrifice his life. Portia had almost limitless chances open to her, yet esteemed Antonio so highly that for his sake she wished to be

> "trebled twenty times myself,
> a thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
> more rich."

Even the minor characters praise him. Gratiano wanted to travel with him, and Launcelot sought to work for him. That he had at once a dignity and a graceful ease

of manner is apparent in the way others addressed him. "My Lord Bassanio" was the usual salutation, and the words carry no touch of aloofness or of scornful irony. In every circumstance, and under every condition, Bassanio was a gentleman.

Antonio

Antonio is a sufferer from, rather than a participant in the course of events. He is the "unhappy subject" of the entire action as well as of the quarrels. The melancholy fits of depression with which he is presented give the key to his whole career. Generous to a fault, reckless of himself, he pledges his own life to help Bassanio secure the needed ducats. To Bassanio he is "the kindest man"; to Shylock a "fawning publican" and "the fool that lends out money gratis." The imminence of death brings no fearful alarms—he is "meetest for death" and well prepared. With his riches he has done a great deal of good and when he can no longer be of service he is ready to die.

Antonio would have our undivided sympathy except for his harsh treatment of Shylock. Gross discourtesy seems out of place in such a character. Yet even here Antonio is again the victim, this time of tradition. As Knight says:

"The one (Antonio) habitually pursues with injustice the subjected man he has been taught to loathe; the other (Shylock) in the depths of his subtle obstinacy seizes upon the occasion to destroy the powerful man he has been compelled to fear."

Portia

Portia is the embodiment of three qualities—mental alertness, faithfulness, and humor. True it is that suitors sought her from afar because of her beauty and her riches, but in the story these play but little part. Her faithfulness is shown by her loyalty to the terms of her father's will. Her skill in handling many and varied suitors, her cleverness in preparing for the trial, and her shrewdness in outwitting the crafty Shylock, testify to the alertness of her mind. Her scornful estimates of some of her suitors, and her cool enjoyment of her husband's uneasiness as he tries to explain his gift of the ring show a keen sense of humor.

William Hazlitt condemns Portia as "pedantic." Other critics with less thoughtfulness refer to her as cold, full of affectation, and deficient in the finer qualities of womanhood. But before applying any such adjectives, we should carefully consider the circumstances in which she was placed. When, for example, we observe her lack of courtesy to the Prince of Arragon, we should recall the intolerance of the whole situation and bring to mind as antidote her graceful and warm welcome to Antonio. Almost every appearance of Portia throughout the play is at a crisis that requires the exercise of strong masculine attributes. Few, if any, opportunities are offered for the display of the gentler and more womanly characteristics of a really great heroine. Her real greatness consists in her ability to sacrifice her real self for the sake of others.

Minor Characters

Of the other characters little need be said. *Lorenzo* is the care-free youthful lover. Thrift and industry mean little to him. Jessica is lively and reckless. Together they steal part of Shylock's treasure but have neither a sense of wrong in so doing, nor any definite plans for the use of the money. A monkey takes Leah's cherished ring, and four score ducats go at one indefinite "sitting." Their married future would be precarious indeed were it not for the fact that Antonio is to be the trustee of their share of Shylock's wealth.

In contrast to these two are *Nerissa* and *Gratiano*. Both are good-natured and inclined to talk too much. Imitation plays a prominent part in their activities. As far as possible they follow every move of Bassanio and Portia, with whose fortunes their own are inseparably connected.

Launcelot Gobbo is the typical low-comedy character of the play. While perhaps not so interesting or amusing as other Shakesperian fools, he nevertheless serves a useful purpose. He occupies the stage while action is dramatically delayed, and while so doing takes the spectator's thoughts from his old master Shylock to his new lord, Bassanio.

Plot

The plot is constructed by the skillful weaving together of three lines of action. The grotesque and highly improbable pound of flesh story at once brings Antonio into the clutches of Shylock and by furnishing the money

whereby Bassanio may win Portia, provides a means for the merchant's deliverance. In spite of their fatalistic exterior, the three mysterious caskets will deliver Portia only to one who will rightly love. Hardly has Bassanio won his lady than he is called upon to rush to the aid of his benefactor. Portia's participation in the trial not only unites these two lines of action but paves the way, by means of the rings, for the happy ending. Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo and her stealing of Shylock's treasure strengthen his anger against Antonio. Even Launcelot, the low-comedy character, helps by his frequent appearance to knit the action more closely together.

The lives and fortunes of all the principal characters are bound up together and give the play its unity of action. So much are we concerned with the fortunes of individual characters that we lose thought of all purely dramatic technicalities such as unity of time and unity of space. Every scene shift gives promise of a new action in the near future, and at the same time carries us along so naturally that even a lapse of three months seems perfectly natural.

With geography we have little or no concern. Belmont is on the coast of Italy and within easy travel distance of Venice. Padua is about equal distance away.

STYLE

Diction

The student of *The Merchant of Venice* should remember not only that Shakespeare was writing three centuries ago, but that he was writing in an age of poetry.

The ardent Elizabethan play-goer could be depended upon to watch eagerly for every accent and modulation of voice. Ideas were adequately conveyed by a gesture, a look, and perhaps a disconnected phrase. Brevity was more to be desired than correctness of diction. Many a colorless line in the mouth of a great interpretative actor became full of vital significance.

The progress of the years has also wrought great changes in the meanings of words. Shakespeare's studies in the Latin prompted him to use many words in a literal sense that are not now so used. For example, *prevent* is used literally as an equivalent for *anticipate,* and *mortifying* is used to mean causing death. Oftentimes, Shakespeare uses words that are rare to-day, as *bestrew, break* (in sense of failing to fulfill an obligation), *cover heavy* (sorrowful), *scarfed,* and many others.

Inflected forms meant little to Shakespeare. Not only are the various pronouns and prepositions interchangeable, but both are frequently omitted. The modern distinctions between transitive and intransitive verbs were not so highly regarded in Shakespeare's day. Frequent changes in mood and tense still further perplex the reader. Parts of sentences and even parts of words are omitted without any feeling of incompleteness. The only requirement of Shakespeare's grammar was that it be understood.

Versification

The Merchant of Venice is written for the most part in blank verse. The usual line consists of five feet with the accent regularly falling on the second syllable in each

foot. This form of verse is called iambic pentameter. Tedious monotony is relieved by frequent shifts of the accent from the second to the first syllable in the foot, and by increasing or decreasing the number of feet in the line. Rhymed lines are frequently interspersed, but as the total number of such lines is but 124, the jingle-like characteristics of a play like the earlier *Love's Labor's Lost* are avoided.

NOTES

1. *Time analysis:*

P. A. Daniel in the *Transactions of the New Shakespeare Society,* 1877, considers the action as occupying eight days, with intervals aggregating three months. His scheme is as follows:

Day 1, Act I.
Interval, about a week.
Day 2, Act II, Scenes I-VII.
Interval, one day.
Day 3, Act II, Scenes VIII and IX.
Interval, bringing the time to within a fortnight of the maturity of the bond.
Day 4, Act III, Scene I.
Interval, a fortnight.
Day 5, Act III, Scenes II to IV.
Day 6, Act III, Scene V, Act IV.
Days 7 and 8, Act V.

Shakespeare's skillful suggestions of the passing of time, and the parallel nature of the action, makes the elapsing of three months hardly noticeable and thus helps to preserve unity.

2. *Shylock, the Jew.*—The play was written to entertain an audience and was not designed either to offend or defend the Jews of the period. Shakespeare had no moral to teach and was not writing with any purpose other than a purely dramatic one. From this point of view it is easy to understand and reconcile the conflicting interpretations of his characters, especially Shylock, rendered by various actors. In fact, some critics have gone as far as to say that the progress of social morality in England may be marked off in stages indicated by successive refinements in the acting of the part of Shylock.

3. *The ducat* is variously estimated as worth from $1.00 to $1.53 in American money; $1.12 is a familiar evaluation. Three thousand ducats, considering the relative purchasing power of money, would be worth in the neighborhood of $30,000 in our day. When the reader recalls Portia's offer to pay 36,000 ducats ($360,000 or more) for the release of Antonio, he will understand the phrase "and richly left."

4. *The Moor* was the type of the colored person in Elizabethan England. The African negro was, of course, wholly unfamiliar. The devil was supposed to have his complexion. The audience would naturally expect the Prince of Morocco to fail, and in this way to learn the secrets of the caskets.

5. *Usury.*—In Shakespeare's time there was no distinction between usury, usance, and interest. All were alike legal, and all were alike hated by unfortunates who had to borrow.

6. *Tragedy or Comedy.*—In spite of the seriousness that attends it, *The Merchant of Venice* is a comedy and

is true structurally to that type of drama. The opening scenes (*Exposition*) show us the relations of the important characters to each other. The complication unites the bond and casket stories.

The former furnishes the *plot* in which Antonio is bound to Shylock and its *climax* of Antonio's utter helplessness. The latter furnishes the *counter plot* through which Antonio is delivered by Portia, and its *catastrophe* marked by Portia's saving words:

> This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood.

A happy ending is thus assured.

7. *The Trial Scene.*—"The whole of the trial-scene, both before and after the entrance of Portia, is a masterpiece of dramatic skill. The legal acuteness, the passionate declamations, the sound maxims of jurisprudence, the wit and irony interspersed in it, the fluctuations of hope and fear in the different persons, and the completeness and suddenness of the catastrophe, cannot be surpassed. Shylock, who is his own counsel, defends himself well, and is triumphant on all the general topics that are urged against him, and only fails through a legal flaw. Take the following as an instance:

"Shylock. What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?
You have among you many a purchas'd slave,
Which like your asses, and your dogs, and mules,
You use in abject and in slavish part,
Because you bought them: shall I say to you
Let them be free, marry them to their heirs?
Why sweat they under burdens? Let their beds
Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates

Be season'd with such viands? you will answer,
The slaves are ours: so do I answer you:
The pound of flesh, which I demand of him,
Is dearly bought, is mine, and I will have it.
If you deny me, fie upon your law!
There is no force in the decrees of Venice;
I stand for judgment: answer; shall I have it?"
(*Hazlitt,* Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.)

8. *Portia's Judgment.*—Careful students of law may question the strict legality of Portia's interpretation, but the dramatist is not concerned with legal technicalities. True it is that the right of access always accompanies possession. Portia's judgment is foreign to all ideas of equity. The real justification is found in the fact that it satisfies a dramatic sense of judgment. Shylock must be curbed, not only to save Antonio and so make the play a comedy, but also to win our sympathy for him in his hour of defeat.

9. *Figures of Speech.*—Among Shakespeare's many forceful uses of figures of speech in this play might be mentioned

> And see my wealthy *Andrew* dock'd in sand,
> *Vailing* her high top lower than *her ribs*
> To *kiss her burial.* (I, i, 25)

> Look how the *floor* of heaven
> Is thick *inlaid with patines of bright gold:*
> There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
> But in his motion *like an angel sings,*
> Still *quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;*
> Such harmony is in immortal souls:
> But whilst this *muddy vesture of decay*
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
> (V. i, 58)

10. *Passages to be memorized.*—There are many excellent passages suitable for use as memory selections. Perhaps the best known are

(*a*) The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings:
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. (IV, i, 185)

(*b*) *Shylock.* To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned at my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? if we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example?

Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.
(III, i, 55)

LIST OF ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS ON THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Act I

Scene 1

1. Why is Antonio sad?
2. What other beginning might you suggest?
3. What facts essential to the story are brought out in this scene?
4. How far is Antonio's true character revealed in this scene?
5. How far is Bassanio's true character revealed in this scene?
6. What is the best single line revealed in this scene?
7. What is the best speech in this scene?

Scene 2

8. In what respect is the beginning of Scene 2 like the beginning of Scene 1?
9. Do you find in Scene 2 any evidence of the traits Portia shows at the trial?
10. Was Portia in love?
11. What evidence is there that Portia had many suitors?
12. Can you give any reason why Scene 2 in both Act I and Act II is in prose?
13. What facts essential to the story are brought out in this scene?
14. Why would not the caskets be chosen rightly except by one who should rightly love?
15. What is the most pleasing figure of speech in Scenes 1 and 2 of Act I?

Scene 3

16. How does Shakespeare make it seem natural that Antonio would sign such a bond?

17. How does Shylock try to make it seem natural to ask for such security as a pound of flesh?
18. Does Antonio believe in Shylock's good-will?
19. What traits of Antonio's character are brought out in this scene?
20. What facts essential to the play are brought out in this scene?
21. How does this scene compare in dramatic value with the scenes that precede it?

Act II

Scene 1

22. Does Morocco love Portia well enough to perform his boasts?
23. Why does Portia, in line 44, send him to the temple?

Scene 2

24. What two traits of Bassanio's character are made more pronounced in this scene?
25. What do you consider the best joke in this scene?
26. Why is Gratiano brought into the play?

Scene 3

27. What is the strife that Jessica refers to in line 19?

Scene 4

28. What preparation had Lorenzo made for eloping with Jessica?

Scenes 5 *and* 6

29. What is the nature of Jessica's home-life as revealed in this scene and Scene 3?
30. In what respects is Jessica like her father?
31. What adjectives would you use in describing Jessica's character?
32. Does Shylock trust Jessica?
33. What apology can be offered for Jessica's conduct?

34. If Bassanio conspired against Shylock what does it show regarding Bassanio's character?
35. How was Gratiano dressed?
36. Was Antonio aware of the plot to steal Jessica?
37. What are the best two scenes thus far in the play?
38. Why are these two scenes better than the others?

Scene 7.

39. Why does Morocco fail?
40. Why does he obtain our sympathy?
41. What is the dramatic use of this scene, and of Scene I of Act II?

Scene 8

42. Was Shylock's life pleasant?
43. At what line of the play is the turning-point from comedy toward tragedy?

Scene 9

44. Why did Arragon decide to risk a choice?
45. Why did Arragon fail?
46. Did Portia expect Bassanio to come?
47. What is the dramatic use of this scene?

Act III

Scene 1

48. What is the condition of Antonio's estate?
49. Can you tell how Antonio's affairs came into this condition?
50. What good construction can you place on Shylock's wish in lines 95-96?
51. Does Shakespeare sympathize with Shylock?
52. Does Shakespeare expect playgoers to sympathize with Shylock?
53. Why does Shylock (line 139) agree to meet Tubal at the synagogue?

54. Give the train of events that has led Shylock to his present state of feeling regarding Antonio.
55. What do you think of Tubal's character?

Scene 2

56. Why might not Bassanio have remained for a little while at Portia's house had he chosen the wrong casket?
57. Did Portia in the first sixty lines of this scene give Bassanio any hint for choosing?
58. What hint is contained in the song?
59. Does Bassanio take this hint?
60. Was Portia forsworn?
61. What does Jessica's remark, in lines 280-286, show regarding her character?
62. Was Bassanio suited to be Portia's "Lord, governor, and king" (186th line)?

Scene 3

63. Is this a good scene?

Scene 4

64. Does Portia show in this scene traits that appear in her character elsewhere in the play?
65. What is the purpose of this scene?

Scene 5

66. What is the purpose of this scene?

Act IV

Scene 1

67. Why was so preposterous a cause allowed to come to court?
68. Is there any possible apology, besides a desire for revenge, for Shylock's ignoring all appeals for mercy?
69. How did the Duke happen to resort to Bellario?
70. Could Portia and Nerissa so have disguised themselves?
71. Why, inasmuch as Portia knew the laws she could quote

against Shylock, did she, and the Duke as well, urge Shylock to show mercy, and finally to have a surgeon by?

72. Wherein is the "jot of blood" decision (line 307) bad law?
73. Wherein is the "just pound" decision (line 328) bad law?
74. In addition to bad law adduced, in what other important respects was Shylock's trial illegal?
75. Why did Shakespeare fail to remedy these errors?
76. What is Gratiano's function in this scene?
77. Is there any evidence in this scene that Portia had large hands?
78. Excepting the "quality of mercy" passage what is the best speech in this scene?
79. In this scene what speech of Shylock's brings out his character best?
80. What words of Antonio's are the most characteristic of him?

Scene 2

81. How does this scene show Shakespeare's skill as a dramatist?

Act V

Scene 1

82. Is Jessica's character here consistent with it as shown elsewhere?
83. What can be learned of Shakespeare's character from this scene?
84. At what line, about, of this scene, does the moon pass under the clouds, and at about what line does it emerge?
85. Did Lorenzo speak the truth in calling himself, in line 16, "an unthrift love"?
86. Is it possible to give any reasonable explanation of how Portia found (line 260) that three of Antonio's ships had come suddenly to port?
87. In what respect is the play weakest?
88. What passage in the play is the best?
89. What other moral, besides the evil of judging by appearances, and the wickedness of greed, does the play set forth?

QUESTIONS ON THE MERCHANT OF VENICE SELECTED FROM REGENTS' AND COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD

1. Give the substance of Portia's remarks to Bassanio immediately after his selection of the casket; show what traits of character are revealed in this speech.

2. Describe Portia's plans for the relief of Antonio and sketch the steps taken in carrying them out.

3. Explain how the elopement of Jessica aids in the plot development of *The Merchant of Venice.*

4. Write a narrative on one of the following topics. Choose the material from the book, and write as though your reader had not read the book.

(*a*) How a bride saved her husband's friend.

(*b*) What a man did with his wife's first present.

5. "Shakespeare wanted his audience to sympathize with Shylock." Give three arguments, based on *The Merchant of Venice,* for or against this statement.

6. Characterize either Shylock or Portia.

7. In a paragraph or two compare *The Merchant of Venice* with any other of Shakespeare's plays that you have read, showing as clearly as you can the most striking points of difference between the two plays.

8. Summarize in one well constructed paragraph of not more than 100 words, *The Merchant of Venice.* Pay particular attention to proportion and to the emphasis of important details.

9. Give illustrations of five of the following: Moment of suspense, antecedent material, character setting, contrast in characterization of an incident, climax, retarding force, sequence of time.

10. Explain how the Prince of Morocco, the prince of Arragon, and Bassanio show their characters by their choice of caskets, giving in substance the inscription on each casket.

11. With what speech or action is the climax reached in *The Merchant of Venice.* Defend your position.

12. Write on the topic:

The Story of the Rings.

13. Describe the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice.* Do not outline the plot but describe the scene as if it were a tableau or a painting, emphasizing what you imagine to have been the grouping, costumes, background, etc.

14. Write a composition of 150 words or more on the following topics:

1. Was justice done to Shylock?
2. The elements of greatness in Shylock's character.
3. The Story of the Caskets.
4. The Pound of Fesh story.
5. The fifth act of *The Merchant of Venice.*
6. The life of young people in Venice.

THE LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire, April 23, 1564. His father was a prominent merchant of the place and for a time was its chief alderman. Every record indicates that Shakespeare's boyhood days were extremely happy. He attended the Stratford Grammar School for seven years, and according to the custom of the day was amply instructed in the Latin authors but very little in English. His unexcelled mastery of English is therefore due to his own earnest efforts. He studied the Bible in a good English translation, and was fortunate enough to attend a church whose clergyman was at once an inspiration and an example.

Family reverses and responsibilities arising from his marriage to Anne Hathaway drove him to London where he soon entered upon his dramatic work. Before 1595 he had produced several plays, notably, the *Comedy of Errors, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, Richard II* and *Richard III.* In addition to these plays, the non-dramatic poem *Venus and Adonis* was published (1593).

In the second period of his work (1595-1601) Shakespeare produced two of his masterpieces, *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice.* In this period we see many evidences of maturity in thought and purpose. The early exaggeration of the *Comedy of Errors* gives place to the philosophical portrayal of Jaques and the sagacious Portia.

The dominant characteristic of the next period of Shakespeare's work is sadness. "In the Depths" is a familiar title for this part of the poet's life. During this time were produced the great tragedies *Julius Cæsar, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear.* The future is dark and foreboding. In the words of Hamlet, "To be, or not to be—that is the question."

Later on, Shakespeare returned to the more cheerful, hopeful spirit of his earlier plays. There is an air of triumph in his heroes. The very atmosphere is invigorating. Gone are the Othellos and the Barnardines, and in their places we find Prospero and Ariel. Even a degraded Caliban is made to serve a noble purpose and "lead them to the springs."

The last few years of his life were spent at Stratford, where he died in 1616 on the anniversary of his birth. He was laid to rest in the little country church that became at once the literary shrine of English speaking people.

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